

# SECOND SAMUEL

## Chapter 24

### *David Counts the Fighting Men*

Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, "Go and take a census of Israel and Judah." <sup>2</sup> So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, "Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are." <sup>3</sup> But Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?" <sup>4</sup> The king's word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel. <sup>5</sup> After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer. <sup>6</sup> They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. <sup>7</sup> Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah. <sup>8</sup> After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. <sup>9</sup> Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand. <sup>10</sup> David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, O LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing." <sup>11</sup> Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David's seer: <sup>12</sup> "Go and tell David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.' " <sup>13</sup> So Gad went to David and said to him, "Shall there come upon you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me." <sup>14</sup> David said to Gad, "I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men." <sup>15</sup> So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. <sup>16</sup> When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD was grieved because of the calamity and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, "Enough! Withdraw your hand." The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite. <sup>17</sup> When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, "I am the one who has sinned and done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall upon me and my family."

24:1 *Again.* The previous occasion may have been the famine of 21:1. (CSB)

*the anger of the LORD burned against Israel.* The specific reason for the Lord's displeasure is not stated. Because the anger is said to be directed against Israel rather than David, some have concluded that it was occasioned by the widespread support among the people for the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba against David (see 15:12; 17:11, 24–26; 18:7; 20:1–2), the divinely chosen and anointed theocratic king. This would mean that the events of this chapter are to be placed chronologically shortly after those of chs. 15–20 and so after 980 B.C. (see note on 15:7). (CSB)

*the LORD... incited David against them.* 1Ch 21:1 says that Satan inspired David to take the census. Although Scripture is clear that God does not cause anyone to sin (Jas 1:13–15), it is also clear that man's—and Satan's—evil acts are under God's sovereign control (see Ex 4:21; 7:3; 9:12; 10:1, 20, 27; 11:10; 14:4; Jos 11:20; 1Ki 22:22–23; Job 1:12; 2:10; Eze 3:20; 14:9; Ac 4:28). (CSB)

For reasons known only to God, He allowed Satan to tempt David. Motivated by pride or thirst for power, the king ordered a census of his army. Chem: “God is said to have incited David because it was a punishment for sin” (*LTh* 1:197). (TLSB)

*take a census of Israel and Judah.* David's military census (see vv. 2–3) does not appear to have been prompted by any immediate external threat. Since he wanted to “know how many there are” (v. 2), it is evident that his action was motivated either by pride in the size of the empire he had acquired or by reliance for his security on the size of the reserve of manpower he could muster in an emergency or, more likely, both. The mere taking of a census was hardly sinful (see Nu 1:2–3; 26:2–4), but in this instance it represented an unwarranted glorying in and dependence on human power rather than the Lord (not much different from Israel's initial desire to have a king for their security; see 1Sa 8–12). The act was uncharacteristic of David (see 1Sa 17:26, 37, 45–47; 2Sa 22:2–4, 47–51). (CSB)

**24:2** *Dan to Beersheba.* See note on 1Sa 3:20. (CSB)

**24:3** *But why ... ?* David's directive does not go unchallenged. The fact that he does not answer suggests that he knew his reasons were highly questionable. In any event, Joab's challenge renders David the more guilty. (CSB)

Joab recognized that David's action could bring guilt on Israel. Cf 1Ch 21:3. (TLSB)

**24:5–8** The military census was begun in southern Transjordan and moved northward, then back across the Jordan, moving from north to south. (CSB)

**24:6** *Gilead ... Kadesh ... Dan ... Sidon.* Toward Galilee and the coast of the Great Sea. (TLSB)

**24:9** *eight hundred thousand ... five hundred thousand.* These figures differ from those of 1Ch 21:5 (see notes on 1Ch 21:5–6). (CSB)

Some commentators account for the disparity in the totals between 2Sm 24 and 1Ch 21 by suggesting a distinction between fully armed soldiers and all men of military age. When God

commanded Moses to conduct a census of the tribes of Israel by their clans and fathers' houses, He established 20 as the age of eligibility for males to enter military service (Nu 1:3). (TLSB)

**24:10** *I have sinned greatly.* See note on v. 1. (CSB)

**24:11** *Gad the prophet, David's seer.* See notes on 1Sa 9:9; 22:5. (CSB)

**24:12** *Go and tell David.* See 12:1 and note. (CSB)

*three options.* The three alternative judgments were all included in the curses that Moses said would come on God's people when they failed to adhere to their covenant obligations (see Dt 28:15–25). (CSB)

*three years of famine.* Cf 21:1.(TLSB)

*flee three months before your foes.* Cf 1Sm 19:18; 21:10; 23:24–25. (TLSB)

*three days' pestilence in your land?* Cf Ex 7–11. Luth: "Frequently an entire nation is punished because of a godless king, just as God also blesses an entire realm because of a pious prince. Thus God prospered all of Syria through Naaman (2Ki 5:1); but because of the sin which David committed He smote the entire people of Israel" (WLS § 2019). (TLSB)

**24:14** *not ... into the hands of men.* David, who knew both God and war, knew that even in his anger God is more merciful than man let loose in the rampages of war (see Ps 30:5). (CSB)

**24:15** *Dan to Beersheba.* See note on 1Sa 3:20. (CSB)

**24:16** *angel.* Angels appear elsewhere in Scripture as instruments of God's judgment (see Ex 33:2; 2Ki 19:35; Ps 35:5–6; 78:49; Mt 13:41; Ac 12:23). (CSB)

The destroying angel sent by God to carry out the pestilence. (TLSB)

*the LORD was grieved.* See note on 1Sa 15:29. (CSB)

Hbr *nacham*. Lit, "repented." (TLSB)

*threshing floor of Araunah.* Located on Mount Moriah, immediately north of David's city and overlooking it. Later it would become the site of the temple (see 1Ch 22:1; 2Ch 3:1). (CSB)

Called "Ornan" in 1Ch 21:15. Native of Jerusalem (see note, Jsh 15:8), not an Israelite. (TLSB)

*Jebusite.* See note on 5:6. (CSB)

**24:17** *Let your hand fall upon me and my family.* Although the people of Israel were not without guilt (see v. 1), David assumes full blame for his own act and acknowledges his responsibility as king for the well-being of the Lord's people (see 5:2; 7:7–8). (CSB)

Those who filled positions of leadership over God's chosen people were to serve as shepherds for His people (cf Ezk 34:1–10; Is 44:28). David recognized that, as shepherd of the people of Israel, his guilt resulted in the death of thousands, and he pleaded with the Lord to direct His wrath toward his own family instead. Aph: "All the diligent pastors [shepherds] used thus to give themselves on behalf of their sheep" (*NPNF* 2 13:384). Bern: "Perceiving and lamenting the slaughter of his people, [David] wished to devote himself for them" (*SLSB*, p 73). David's prayer was fulfilled in the Passion of Jesus, the Son of David and our Good Shepherd. (TLSB)

### *David Builds an Altar*

**18** On that day Gad went to David and said to him, "Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite." **19** So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad. **20** When Araunah looked and saw the king and his men coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground. **21** Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?" "To buy your threshing floor," David answered, "so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped." **22** Araunah said to David, "Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. **23** O king, Araunah gives all this to the king." Araunah also said to him, "May the LORD your God accept you." **24** But the king replied to Araunah, "No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. **25** David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.

**24:18** *raise an altar ... on the threshing floor.* Perhaps because God had revealed Himself there through His angel. David was supposed to offer sacrifices there to appease the wrath of the Lord. (TLSB)

**24:19** *as the LORD had commanded.* The Lord himself appointed the atoning sacrifice in answer to David's prayer. (CSB)

**24:21** *To buy your threshing floor.* David does not simply expropriate the property for his royal purposes (see 1Sa 8:14). (CSB)

**24:24** *burnt offerings.* See Lev 1:1–17. (CSB)

*David bought the threshing floor.* Thus the later site of the temple (see note on v. 16) became the royal property of the house of David. (CSB)

*and the oxen.* David's haste could not wait for oxen to be brought some distance from his own herds. (CSB)

*fifty shekels.* See note on 1Ch 21:25. (CSB)

*for a price.* Sacrifice had to be costly for David. (TLSB)

**24:25** *built there an altar.* This altar was built where Solomon's temple would later be built. Cf 1Ch 22:1. (TLSB)

*fellowship offerings.* See note on 1Sa 11:15. Reconciliation and restoration of covenant fellowship were obtained by the king's repentance, intercessory prayer and the offering of sacrifices. (CSB)

**Ch 24** David's obsession with numbers and statistical strength does not belong in matters of faith. God did not command this census, so He punishes Israel because of it. The temptation to apply worldly strategies in matters of faith is great but should be resisted. Yet, pestilence led to David's repentance, repentance led to sacrifice, and sacrifice led to the temple—the place of God's mercy on earth. Likewise, Christ's cross was a sacrifice to appease God's wrath, which now has resulted in the place of God's mercy on earth: the means of grace in the Holy Christian Church. • "Lamb of God, pure and holy, Who on the cross didst suffer, Ever patient and lowly, Thyself to scorn didst offer. All sins Thou borest for us, Else had despair reigned o'er us: Have mercy on us, O Jesus!" Amen. (*LSB* 434:1). (TLSB)